

Galatians 3 P8



(GAL 3:8-14)

PRAY

Last week we BEGAN our discussion of the VERSES we just READ together (BUT were NOT able to finish). And that because these verses contain great theological DEPTH and therefore require a little bit more MENTAL energy. HENCE why I told you (last week) to put your floaties on – b/c these verse represent the “deep end” of Paul’s argumentation in the book!

There is another REASON (however) – and it is the ONE I want to USE to GET us back into our discussion.

These verses ALSO represent Paul’s MAIN FOCUS in the book: JUSTIFICATION by FAITH alone (in Christ alone).

As I said last time, THIS was the BATTLE that caused PAUL to write this letter (in the first place). This was also the ISSUE (the issue of justification) THAT most threatened to TEAR the church apart (in Paul’s life-time): HOW a person was made JUST/RIGHT before GOD (under the NEW COVENANT)?

At the time that PAUL writes this, many within the Jerusalem church (including such “pillars” as PETER and JAMES) were under the impression that SUCH a standing with GOD required more than simple FAITH in CHRIST. For them, it required also a continued observation of the OC clean laws. And I use that word “continued” deliberately – since this HAD BEEN the prescribed way of entering into a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP w/GOD for the past two thousand years. A person needed to practice the clean laws of circumcision, sacrifice, Sabbaths and various washings related to separation (Paul BTW calls these “the works of the law” in his letters – which is why in using this phrase the context is always associated with one or all of these 4 things: circumcision, sacrifices, Sabbaths or separation issues – e.g. 2:3, 12, 4:9-10, 5:2, 6:12-15; Rom 3:28-30, 4:9-13).

SO then—this is what “works of the law” means in SCRIPTURE. It is not in reference to someone earning their salvation (that was never in Paul’s mind – nor any other writer in Scripture)—rather they refer to the OC clean laws – those things prescribed by GOD (under the OC) as the means to entering into a right relationship with HIM:

And the most likely REASON (the Jerusalem church thought that the observance of these OC “works of the law” were still necessary) WAS two-fold:

(1st) b/c in the OT, God made it clear THAT HIS LAWS were never to BE removed (Deu 12:32)...

(2nd) but Jesus Himself had ALSO affirmed the same in the NT (Mat 5:18).

As such, their gospel presentation BECAME “faith in Jesus PLUS observance of the OC clean laws” in order to be RIGHT/JUSTIFIED before GOD.

Paul (however) KNEW this to BE a false GOSPEL message (and therefore one that would damn to Hell) all who chose to embrace it – including Peter and James and the Jerusalem church (which is why he says what he does in 1:8-9).

THIS is why (also) THEN HE PENS this LETTER to the GALATIANS with a FOCUS on proving JUSTIFICATION by faith alone (in Christ alone) –b/c THEY (to his dismay) were beginning to BUY into this NEW HERESY being circulated by Peter (and the compliance teams from the Jerusalem church—groups Paul call the “circumcision party” in 2:12).

And since THIS IS a theological ISSUE, Paul’s response is LIKEWISE.

IOW: He defends JUSTIFICATION by faith alone according to SOUND (and deep!) THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS –which brings us (then) to the TRUTH established by PAUL in our verses...

10. GTGR means understanding that justification gained by faith alone is supported by historical proof, precedent and prophecy (1-14).

“GTGR” is (as discussed in the past) THE LARGER THEME (and purpose) PAUL has in mind (in writing all that he does to the GALATIANS) – and why it was preserved for US (as Christians TODAY)---so that we WOULD KNOW what WAS necessary for “GTGR”.

AND a piece of that (is again) this PIECE related to JUSTIFICATION by faith alone – a TRUTH PAUL finds support FOR according to THREE theological arguments.

The first two (historical proof and precedent) were contained in our DISCUSSION of verses 1 through 7—WHICH BRINGS US (then) to where WE LEFT OFF (last week)---that being HISTORICAL PROPHECY.

There ARE 4 PROPHECIES that Paul presents (here in these verses) as continuing SUPPORT for HIS position of Justification by faith alone...

And since we HAVE ALREADY discussed in DETAIL the first TWO of these – let’s re-engage our TEXT by simply REVIEWING them (and then DIGGIN into our NEW material).

10.3.1. Prophecy #1: the blessing of Abraham: (and that we saw from vv8-9)

In these verses Paul makes the argument THAT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE *is* WHAT was prophesied to Abraham (in Gen 12:7) when GOD promised that ONE DAY “in him the Gentiles (or nations) shall be blessed”. Therefore, the Gentile Galatians who HAD expressed faith alone qualify as the recipients of this prophecy. They - like Abraham (“the man of faith”), are “blessed” (i.e. justified by that faith) and DO NOT need to observe the “works of the law”.

Possibly a BIGGER REASON for NOT observing the “works of the law” as a means to JUSTIFICATION (however) is found in what WE DISCUSSED as Paul’s second piece of prophetic support (and that is)...

10.3.2. Prophecy #2: the curse of the Law (which we find in v10)

Here Paul makes it CLEAR that the “works of the law” COULD not ultimately remove the curse (or stain of sin) left by breaking one of God’s commands. As such, the words of Deu 27:26 (“cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them”) became words which ALSO functioned prophetically. Their inability to truly JUSTIFY demanded a future solution – the solution found in JUSTIFICATION by faith ALONE.

AND that brings us (then) to our new material and the third prophecy Paul uses to make his point regarding JUSTIFICATION by faith alone...

10.3.3. Prophecy #3: the promise of Habakkuk ((11-12))

The two times Paul mentions “the law” in these verses – HE is referring (again) to “the works of the law” (or the clean laws – those laws again which pertained to JUSTIFICATION under the OC). It is common for Paul (in his letters) to say “the works of the law” and (then) in the statements following simply refer to them as “the law”. And it is CLEAR that is what he is doing (here) since that is HIS specific focus within the LAW (and what he explicitly states in verse 10 in connection to the issue of justification – “For those who rely on the works of the law...”) (An example of this elsewhere = Rom 3:20-28).

With that in mind (then—going back to Galatians 3) Paul says in v12 , “the (works of the) law are NOT of faith” – and as support for that He quotes Lev 18:5 (“The one who does them shall live by them”) IOW: to be clean/justified under the OC, a person needed to DO something (sacrifice an animal, participate in various washings, etc.). As such, this is the VERY opposite of FAITH (which is NOT about doing anything yourself – but trusting in the work of another).

As such “it is evident (as Paul says in v11) that no one is justified before God” in this way FOR “the righteous shall live by faith” (righteous referring to those who are truly justified by GOD).

And this is the prophecy of Habakkuk 2:4 (a prophecy Paul was fond of quoting as support for his position that JUSTIFICATION is GAINED through FAITH alone. He quotes the same text in (Rom 1:17)—and there makes it clear that the MEANS to true, payment JUSTIFICATION has always been by faith alone (Rom 1:17 is the passage (BTW) that started the Reformation: Luther read this and realized the HERESY of the RCC in their teaching on justification (one must merit/earn through good deeds their justification).

(SO then) whether it be the prescribed actions of the clean laws – which were in no way meant to communicate merit-or someone earning their justification – OR the prescribed actions of the RCC – which WERE meant to communicate a merit-based form of justification—BOTH DID NOT fit what the BIBLE taught from cover to cover as the means to TRUE PAYMENT JUSTIFICATION – it was by faith alone).

And that (of course) is the point PAUL is attempting to make (here)...NOT only do the OC clean laws (i.e. “the works of the law”) not truly justify and as a result bring a curse) – BUT they are NOT of faith (since faith in principle does not “work” yet the OC clean laws required that very thing—the DOING of certain things to live).

By consequence these verses deny the idea commonly held today that those under the OC were justified/saved by faith (as we are). Paul is making it clear that the OC soteriological system was NOT based on faith.

This is the whole reason Paul calls them “works” (in the NT): to CONTRAST them with FAITH (which does not possess physical actions).

The other HERESY rooted out (and exposed) by these verses = The belief (today) that if a person “falls away”/apostatizes they never truly had faith/believed (b/c “genuine/saving faith works”). If that is the case, then the principle that Paul establishes HERE in making HIS argument against the works of the law as a form of faith, falls apart—SINCE it would be possible for faith to possess works/actions. Yet again this is PAUL’S main point: actions are incompatible with faith!

This (also then) reinforces the (forgotten doctrine) of loss of justification as the proper way of understanding what happens when people “fall away” from obedience to God (and the Christian life). It is not that they NEVER had faith (since what identifies genuine faith is not a person’s actions—this is why James can say that the “demons believe”). They had faith (and may still have faith) but like the demons are not faithful so have “fallen away” from their RIGHT STANDING with GOD (i.e. they have lost their justification).

Why people mess this up (viewing only genuine faith as that which produces works) = B/C they misunderstand James’ words in (Jam 2:14-26) – James is not calling into question a person’s faith (otherwise how could he say the “demons believe”?) but rather the genuineness of their “religion” (this is HOW James is using the word “faith” in chapter 2 AND is the main theme of the book: THE **true** Christian religion of faith and faithfulness v. THE **counterfeit** Christian religion of “easy-believism”/antinomianism – see Jam 1:22-27).

10.3.4. Prophecy #4: Christ as our curse ((13-14))

Yet another HERESY within the church TODAY is rooted out (and exposed) by Paul’s words = this time it is the HERESY known as THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST (Christ’s death was not enough to secure our JUSTIFICATION, we need also His life of perfect obedience applied to us as well). NOTICE, Paul makes it clear that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law” solely by HIS work in “becoming a curse for us - for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on the tree”. (IOW): His DEATH by being “hanged on the tree” of the CROSS (what is known as His passive obedience) was ENOUGH to secure our JUSTIFICATION (Heb 10:10, 14, 13:12).

Never does the BIBLE teach that WE need Christ’s life of obedience applied to US (it is only His death). The purpose of His obedient life WAS NOT so that it (too) could be applied to our account. If that were TRUE then HIS death becomes completely unnecessary (since once his life is applied there is no SIN to be atoned for. Why did He not just live the perfect life THEN ascend back to heaven?

The REASON Jesus needed to live a perfect life was so that He could become the PERFECT SACRIFICE bringing true payment JUSTIFICATION (a sacrifice w/o blemish - Heb 9:14).

(BTW) This heresy (the Active Obedience of Christ) is a jewel in the crown of Evangelicalism and it (along w/the HERESY of believing that one cannot lose their JUSTIFICATION) are the MAIN REASONS so many (today) professing to be Christian look NO different than the world (b/c this heresy tells them that their faithfulness is not necessary SINCE Christ has already been faithful for them). THIS (HOWEVER again) is taught NOWHERE in the BIBLE. IT is not what Christ came to DO for us – (nor was it necessary for Him to do it for us).

Paul (once more) makes it clear WHAT was: redeeming us “from the curse of the law... ((14)).

And this (then) represents the FINAL prophecy PAUL uses to DRIVE HOME his position that JUSTIFICATION (true/real payment for sin) is something GAINED by faith alone (in Christ alone).

It also represents the RECONCILIATION POINT between the two PROPHECIES in contrast (“the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles” versus the outstanding “curse” left by the law). Notice AGAIN- both of these things are mentioned in these last two verses v13 = “the curse”; v14 = “the blessing of Abe to the Gentiles”). Through the DEATH of Christ both were RESOLVED and FULFILLED. As such, the prophecy of Habakkuk is (also) realized (the righteous/just shall live by faith)—WHICH MEANS PAUL has (once more) proved HIS point: JUSTIFICATION *is* GAINED by FAITH ALONE (by looking to the another WHO by His blood secured it for us) ---

What this also means is that WE NOW have the answer to Peter and James (and the rest of the gang at Jerusalem’s problem regarding Deu 12:32 and NOT removing some part of God’s law). Through faith alone in Christ the clean laws WERE still being practiced – SINCE through HIS BLOOD we are MADE CLEAN!

THIS (however) is NOT the ONLY REASON (Paul tells US) that Christ DIED...

In closing (I call you attention back to this last purpose clause in verse 14)...

In addition to GAINING our JUSTIFICATION, Christ died “so that we might receive the promised spirit by faith”.

NOW...This supports Paul’s position of JUSTIFICATION by faith alone since the promise (was prophecy) and the rec’g of the Spirit a CLEAR sign that someone HAD rec’d JUSTIFICATION...

BUT THERE is far more than JUST THAT being communicated HERE...

What Paul is also TELLING us (here) IS NOT JUST that Christ died so that we could GAIN JUSTIFICATION by faith alone...BUT so that WE COULD (and would!) MAINTIAN this incredible GIFT in faithful obedience BY the HELP and POWER (of another gift)—THE HOLY SPIRIT (since that WAS the reason we have rec’d Him – is IT not? HE does not exist in our lives for the purpose of GAINING our justification – that happens AGAIN – by faith alone. He is instead provided AFTER that—as the help-mate to maintaining what we’ve gained.

Which means THIS: though WHAT PAUL is focused and fighting FOR in these verses is THE TRUTH of JUSTIFICATION GAINED by faith alone—It is NEVER in isolation from the OBLIGATION that privileged position establishes... And that is a life of MAINTIANING such justification through faithful obedience (by the power/gift of the HS) – a subject we will see more on (in chapters 5-6). Which means ALSO that by the time we end this book, WE will SEE the GOSPEL (in its full understanding of both GAIN and MAINTIAN)—B/C (as we have seen) this (too) is what we must understand if we are to GTGR. **PRAY**